DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 400 075 PS 024 587

AUTHOR Bernier, Annie; Larose, Simon
TITLE Attachment Representations to Parents and Prediction of Feelings of Loneliness during a College Transition.
PUB DATE Aug 96
NOTE 15p.; Paper presented at the Biennial Meeting of the International Society for the Study of Behavioural Development (14th, Quebec City, Quebec, Canada, August 12-16, 1996).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adjustment (to Environment); *Attachment Behavior; College Freshmen; Higher Education; *Late Adolescents; Life Events; *Loneliness; Longitudinal Studies; Parent Child Relationship; Parents; Separation Anxiety; Transitional Programs; *Young Adults
IDENTIFIERS *Security of Attachment

ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between attachment security to both parents and feelings of loneliness throughout the transition to college, and the impact of the presence or absence of a physical separation from parents. A total of 125 adolescents completed two measures of attachment--Mother-Father-Peer Scale and Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA)--and one measure of loneliness (UCLA Loneliness Scale-Revised) at the end of high school, during their first semester at college, and 1 1/2 years later. Seventy-one students lived with their parents during the first semester at college, and 54 had left home to attend college. The IPPA showed good construct validity and test-retest reliability. Feelings of loneliness tended to increase during the transition and decrease after the transition only for adolescents who had left their parents. Adolescents who remained home while attending college did not experience significant changes in loneliness during or after transition. For adolescents who stayed home, attachment to mother was stable during the transition, but attachment to father decreased during the second year in college. For adolescents separated from their parents, attachment increased during the transition, then remained stable for father or decreased for mother after the transition. Hierarchical regression analyses revealed that only insecure attachment to father predicted loneliness in the second year of college beyond that of the high school level. (KDFB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 400 075

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Attachment representations to parents and prediction of feelings of loneliness during a college transition.

Annie BERNIER and Simon LAROSE.

Université Laval, Québec, Canada.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND
DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL
HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Anne Bernier

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

Poster presented at the XIVth Biennal Meetings of the *International Society for the Study of Behavioural Development*, August 12-16, 1996, Québec City, Canada.

PS 024587

Requests for reprints should be sent to: annie.bernier@psy.ulaval.ca

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

ABSTRACT

It has been suggested that early experiences with parents lead to the development of attachment representations, which may have an impact on later personal adjustment (Bowlby, 1982; Kobak & Sceery, 1988). The aim of this longitudinal study was to examine the relation between attachment representations to father and to mother and feelings of loneliness throughout the college transition, and according to the presence or absence of a separation from parents. 125 adolescents completed, at the end of high school (T1), during the first semester in college (T2), and 1.5 years later (T3), two measures of attachment and one measure of loneliness. Both attachment to father and to mother showed higher test-retest correlation stability than loneliness did. Some changes appear at the mean level of attachment and loneliness scores, but the pattern of change was function of the separation experience and the attachment figure. Finally, hierarchical regression analyses showed that only insecure attachment to father predicts loneliness in college above and beyond that in high school.

INTRODUCTION

Attachment theory suggests that positive early attachment experiences lead to the development of secure attachment representations. These representations would influence the development of positive self-regard and feelings of trust in others, which in turn, promote emotional well-being. Recent research has demonstrated a strong positive link between attachment security and personal adjustment (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987; Collins & Read, 1990; Cotterell, 1992; Papini & Roggman, 1992). However, few studies have examined the respective impacts of attachment to father and mother on personal adjustment. Also, few studies have examined if these impacts could be different for adolescents still living with their parents and adolescents separated from them.

AIM AND HYPOTHESES

The aim of the present study was to examine the relation between attachment security to both parents and loneliness throughout the college transition. Two original contributions of this study were its longitudinal perspective and the comparison between adolescents who left home to attend college and those who did not. It was expected:

1° that feelings of loneliness increase during the transition from high school to college.

2° that attachment security predicts feelings of loneliness in college above and beyond those in high school.

METHOD

Participants and procedure

Time 1: 125 adolescents (mean age = 16.7 years) were seen at the end of high school to complete two measures of attachment and one measure of loneliness.

Time 2: The 125 participants completed the measures of attachment and loneliness again, 6 months later (during the first semester in college). 71 of them were still living with their parents, while the other 54 had left them to attend college.

Time 3: A year and a half after the first data collection (third semester in college), the 125 participants completed again the measures of attachment and loneliness.

Measures

Mother-Father-Peer scale (MFP: Epstein, 1983).

In the present study, 2 MFP subscales were used. The first one (independence) assesses how much the participant thinks his father and his mother have prompted him to use his own resources and become independent. The second one (acceptance) assesses how much the participant thinks his father and his mother have appreciated, accepted and loved him as a child.

The MFP shows excellent convergent and construct validity (Epstein, 1983). In this study, coefficients of internal consistency at T1 were: .79 (independence/mother); .76 (independence/father); .83 (acceptance/mother); and .88 (acceptance/father).

Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA: Armsden & Greenberg, 1987).

The IPPA is a 28-item questionnaire assessing current attachment representations to both parents. A global attachment score was obtained by adding the confidence and communication subscales scores and substracting the alienation subscale score.
The IPPA shows good construct validity and test-retest reliability (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987). In this study, coefficients of internal consistency at T1 were .86 (attachment to mother) and .88 (attachment to father).

A principal component analysis was performed on the MFP and IPPA subscales. Two orthogonal factors emerged, one representing a dimension of attachment security to father, the other one representing a dimension of attachment security to mother. These two factorial scores were used in the subsequent analyses.

UCLA Loneliness Scale-revised (UCLA-LS-r; Russell, Peplau, & Cutrona, 1980).

The UCLA-LS-r is a 20-item self-report questionnaire assessing feelings of loneliness. It shows good convergent, discriminant and concurrent validity. In the present study, Cronbach alpha for the loneliness score at T1 was .93.

RESULTS

Changes and stability in loneliness and attachment

Table 1 shows that feelings of loneliness were less stable than attachment during the college transition. However, as shown in table 2, there were significant time differences only for adolescents who have left their parents. Their feelings of loneliness tend to increase during the transition, and then to decrease after the transition. Adolescents who stayed home in attending college, in average, don't experience important modifications of loneliness during or after the transition (table 2).

Table 2 shows that for adolescents who stayed home in attending college, attachment to mother is quite stable during the transition, but that attachment to father decreases during the second year in college. For adolescents who are separated from their parents, attachment tends to increase during the transition, and then to stay stable (for the father) or decrease (for the mother) after the transition (table 2).

Prediction of loneliness

Since a prior study (Larose, Boivin, Bernier, & Poulin, 1994) has examined the relation between attachment representations, parental separation and loneliness at T2, the present study aims specifically at predicting loneliness at T3.

As shown in table 3, attachment to father predicts loneliness in college above and beyond that in high school. Attachment to mother, separation as well as separation*attachment interactions had no significant effects.

Table 1

Correlations of attachment scores to father and mother, and of loneliness scores, between T1, T2, and T3

	Attachment to father		Attachment to mother		Loneliness	
	T2	T3	T2	T3	T2	T3
Attachment-T1	.87*	.79*	.78*	.72*		
Attachment-T2		.81*		.83*		
Loneliness-T1					.57*	.50*
Loneliness-T2						.58*

* : $p < .01$

Table 2

Means of attachment and loneliness scores at T1, T2, and T3, according to the presence or absence of a separation from parents.

	Living with parents			Separated		
	T1	T2	T3	T1	T2	T3
Loneliness	1.79	1.78	1.79	1.77	1.99[b]	1.75
Attachment to father	0.09	0.08	-0.04[a]	-0.10[c]	0.04	0.05
Attachment to mother	0.08	0.09	0.03	-0.05	0.07[b]	-0.03

a: significantly different from T1 and T2
b: significantly different from T1 and T3
c: significantly different from T2 and T3

Table 3

Hierarchical regression of loneliness-T1, separation and attachment scores on loneliness-T3

Predicted variable		Variables in the equation	Cumulative %	Unique %	Beta
Loneliness-T3	Step 1	Loneliness-T1	19.5%	19.5%	0.44***
	Step 2	Separation	19.6%	0.1%	-0.03
	Step 3	Attachment	26.5%	6.9%	
		Father			-0.28**
		Mother			-0.03
	Step 4	Interaction	27.0%	0.5%	
		Separ.* attach/father			-0.23
		Separ.* attach/mother			0.01

*** : $p < .001$. ** : $p < .01$.

DISCUSSION

This study showed that attachment to both mother and father is more stable than loneliness during the college transition. This suggests that loneliness might be more of a situational construct than attachment, which is less influenced by the transition, and so might be more of a personal characteristic.

The results also indicated that for adolescents who stayed home in attending college, loneliness and attachment to mother are quite stable throughout the college transition. However, attachment to father decreases during the second year in college, indicating perhaps a greater need for autonomy and independence for those adolescents still living home.

The results of this study showed a clear pattern of change throughout the transition for those adolescents who had to deal with the separation. Indeed, adolescents who left their parents to attend college experiment an increase of loneliness during the first semester in college, and then, a decrease during the second year. This suggests that those adolescents have to deal with the dissolution of their social network when they enter college, and then integrate themselves into a new one during their first and second years in college.

Those adolescents also experiment an increase of attachment to both parents during the college transition, which suggests that separation from their parents and short-term adjustment difficulties may activate their attachment system.

Finally, the results of this study showed that only insecure attachment to father predicts loneliness in the second year of college above and beyond that in high school. This might suggest that the instrumental and informative support most often provided by attachment to father (Youniss & Smollar, 1985) might be more needed at this time of career choices, and so be more related to personal adjustment. However, attachment to mother, with its more salient affective function (Youniss & Smollar, 1985), might be less needed during the second year in college, where emotional and personal matters are less prominent than during the first year, and thus attachment to mother would be less related to personal adjustment at this time.

REFERENCES

Armsden, G.C., & Greenberg, M.T. (1987). The inventory of parent and peer attachment: Individual differences and their relationship to psychological well-being in adolescence. Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 16, 427-454.

Bowlby, J. (1982). Attachment and Loss, vol. 1: Attachment (2nd ed.). New York: Basic books.

Collins, N.L., & Read, S.J. (1990). Adult attachment, working models, and relationship quality in dating couples. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 58, 644-663.

Cotterell, J.L. (1992). The relation of attachments and supports to adolescent well-being and school adjustment. Journal of Adolescent Research, 7, 28-42.

Epstein, S. (1983). The mother-father-peer scale. Unpublished manuscript, University of Massachussets, Amherst.

Kobak, R.R., & Sceery, A. (1988). Attachment in late adolescent: Working models, affect regulation, and representation of self and others. Child Development, 59,

Larose, S., Boivin, M., Bernier, A., & Poulin, F. (July 1994). Changes and stability in attachment representations, perceived social support, and personal adjustment during a social and academic transition in late adolescence. Poster presented at the XIIIth Biennal Meetings of the International Society for the Study of Behavioural Development, Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

Papini, D.R., & Roggman, L.A. (1992). Adolescent perceived attachment to parents in relation to competence, depression, and anxiety: A longitudinal study. Journal of Early Adolescence, 12, 420-440.

Russell, D., Peplau, L.A., & Cutrona, C.E. (1980). The revised UCLA Loneliness Scale: Concurrent and discriminant validity evidence. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 39, 472-480.

Youniss, J., & Smollar, J. (1985). Adolescent relations with mothers, fathers, and friends. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.